

Guidance for Observing Tenure-Track Faculty Members in a Remote Environment

Classroom observations are a way to provide positive and constructive feedback to faculty members. Feedback given as part of a formal observation process can be very helpful in the context of self-development and incorporating positive change into the classroom. While there may be some similarities to conducting evaluations in a remote environment, there will be noticeable differences. These guidelines were created in an effort to conduct classroom observations in a way that provides constructive feedback and an opportunity for dialogue on remote teaching and learning.

The City Colleges of Chicago Classroom Observation form for tenure-track faculty members can be found [here](#).

Pre-Observation Meeting

Just like in an in-person setting, individuals conducting evaluations should reach out to the faculty member being evaluated to introduce themselves and to let them know they will be observing their class. With remote learning occurring differently across disciplines and in each class, it is important for the observer to understand how the faculty member is teaching and how they are communicating with their students. Some examples:

- If a faculty member is using pre-recorded lectures, the observer would need to know how to access the lectures and how they fit into the class curriculum.
- A faculty member utilizing discussion boards should have the opportunity to describe how the discussion board and associated discussion topics fit into the assigned readings or other activities for the week.
- Faculty members conducting live zoom lectures can explain how the lecture will be presented, any activities that may occur, and any information that may be important for an observer to know.

Each remote classroom will be unique, and it is important that observers understand how the individual faculty member has structured their class and what should be reviewed as part of the observation.

Post-Observation Meeting

It is highly encouraged that the observer schedule a post-observation meeting to provide initial feedback and to ask any questions that they have. For instance, an observer might not be able to find something on the syllabus but the faculty has located it in another spot in the course shell. Each faculty member is likely to have their course structured differently, so it is important to communicate any questions/concerns before formally documenting.

Documenting the Observation & Classroom Environment

While documenting the observation, the observer should keep in mind that the observation process is an avenue to provide positive and constructive feedback. The feedback provided from the observer should come from a 'first do no harm' mindset. Some helpful hints on documenting the observation are listed below.

Not Applicable is OK – Not everything listed on an observation form may be relevant to a remote class. It is important to keep in mind that using N/A is ok. For instance, noting attendance or students being tardy might not be applicable in a class using pre-recorded sessions.

Communication – Communication will look different in a remote environment and faculty will be using various modes of communication to pass along information to their students. If there are questions about how/what is being communicated please be sure to bring this up during the pre or post observation meeting. An example of this might be reviewing the syllabus and ensuring the times of the class, how to access virtual office hours, and other key information is being clearly communicated to the student.

What Belongs in an Observation – Observations should include feedback related to teaching and learning in the classroom and a description of the class (live lectures, pre-recorded sessions, etc). Things like gender, hairstyles, accents, or other personal attributes should not be observed.

Distractions – Distractions in the traditional classroom might not be relevant in a remote classroom. It is important to understand what is distracting and what is not in a remote environment. There may be a child or pet in the background of a zoom call, this is not a distraction unless there is something taking the attention away from the learning process.

Attendance & Student Participation – Faculty members may have individual classroom etiquette rules when it comes to student attendance and participation. There may be an understanding with the faculty member that a specific student 'call into' the synchronous session, but not participate in the conversation due to external factors. Or, a faculty member may record live lectures and allow students to watch at a later time. The pre and post observation conversation meetings provide a time for both parties to understand what the faculty member is requiring of their class.